J.L. MATTHEWS

It's possible for a man's destiny to lie in a very simple act. Often the greatest decisions in one's life are formed, not by astounding events, but by a yes or no, a change of weather, or as in the case of James Lewis Matthews, by the toss of a coin.

A native of Bristol, England, Mr. Matthews came with his family to Manitoba in the year 1883. His father engaged in ranching and knew a measure of success until for three consecutive years the severe Canadian winters lasted into the spring, destroying his crops.

After the third year, young Matthews knew that he must look elsewhere for his [illegible] and that is when he let a coin decide his fate -- tails he would go to Tasmania, [illegible] he would go to Southern California.

Mr. Matthews doesn't know exactly why he should have considered Tasmania -- perhaps the name had a fascinating sound or perhaps he had heard of it as a place of adventure. At any rate, he was never to visit that country because it was decreed that Southern California was to be his destination.

A short time after arriving in the southland he was standing on a Pasadena street corner wondering just where to look for employment, when he overheard one man say to another that he wished he could find a printer. Not overlooking the opportunity, Mr. Matthews stepped up to him and assured him that he was just the person to fill the job.

Upon learning that this young man really did know something about printing and that he had worked in a print shop as a boy, the stranger hired him at once -- thus Covina and Mr. Matthews' first association with the Argus. His new employer was Eugéne Clarke, at that time editor.

That was in the year 1894 and when he had been driven for a few miles in a buckboard by the mail carrier from Azusa, he was surprised when the driver stopped and looked at him expectantly. Mr. Matthews, you see, was still waiting to reach Covina, not realizing that this little village with its few scattered buildings was his destination.

Three months later he bought the business. At that time, the tiny Argus shop and office were located on the present site of the telephone building.

One of Mr. Matthews' first public works was to assist in securing the Southern Pacific right-of-way from Bassett to Covina. This project became a reality in 1896 when the first Southern Pacific engine came triumphantly down the tracks, giving Covina its first modern means of transportation.

He was also influential in the advent of the Pacific Electric in 1903. In 1904 he was appointed postmaster and served in that capacity for twelve years. The post office was then located in the Reed block on Citrus Avenue. It was not until Mr. Matthews built the Argus building on Badillo Street that the post office was moved. It was located in the Argus block until 1940 when it was moved to it's own building at Second and College Streets.

Mr. Matthews was president of the Chamber of Commerce at a time when the yearly budget reached the amazing figure of $5,000.00. Heading a group of aggressive men who were determined that the beauty and opportunities of this district should become generally known, Mr. Matthews and other chamber members would meet prospective buyers and residents and take them on automobile tours of the valley.

Their own enthusiasm for the community was contagious and today many a satisfied

campaign director of the Los Angeles County Flood Control District Bond Elections. The first bond election was for $3,500,000.00 in 1916 and the second in 1924 for $35,000,000.00. Through this second bond issue, the thirteen dams in the county flood control area were built. Under Governor Stevens, Mr. Matthews was for two years California State Water Commissioner.

Always interested in Republican politics, Mr. Matthews has served as both national and state director of several Los Angeles County Republican campaigns, either in the capacity of director of publicity or as managing director.

When the California Department of Unemployment Insurance was organized in 193[illegible] Mr. Matthews was appointed as chairman of the Unemployment Reserves Commission, one of the five commissions who controlled the Department of Employment.

Known as the "Chief" to his Sacramento associates, Matthews served on the commission until January 1, 1943. The Department of Unemployment is now called the California Department of Employment with an office in Covina.

Mr. Matthews is responsible for many of the real estate subdivisions in Covina. With three or four associates, he subdivided the extensive Walker tract as well as the Griswold, Dr. Jennings, Wells and Jennison tracts. For the most part, these tracts cover almost the entire town, including the Adams Park tract which is his most recent subdivision.

Now one of the most charming residential sections in the City, Mr. Matthews and his associates are very proud of this project as they are responsible for its planning, restrictions and sidewalks.

At the present time, Mr. Matthews is taking an active part in his newspaper, serving as it's editor and publisher.

Mrs. Matthews is the former Delia Bashor, daughter of Martin Bashor, also an early pioneer. They were married in the Covina Methodist Church. Their children and grandchildren have been christened in this same Church.

Mr. and Mrs. Matthews have two daughters, both wives of former Covina boys, Mrs. Horace White (Lucile Matthews) who, with her husband and small son, makes her home in Honolulu. Mr. White is vice president of the Hawaiian Trust Company.

Genevieve Matthews is the wife of William Prior Letchworth and resides in Berkeley. Mr. Letchworth is a partner in the pioneer firm of Barth and Company, specializing in bonds and investments. Their eldest son, W.P. Letchworth, Jr., is serving with the United States Marine Corps.

Mr. Matthews died Thursday morning on May 17, 1945.

Part of his Obit ?
by Methodist Church